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## SHOULD IDEALISM PERISH IN THE INDUSTRIAL SOUTH?

“Humanity, that tireless traveller, advances unceasingly over vale and hill, to-day on the heights in the light of day, to-morrow in the valley in darkness and danger, but always advancing, and attaining by slow degrees and weary efforts some broad plateau, where he pauses a moment to rest and take breath.

“These pauses, during which society assumes a form which suits it for the moment, are organic periods. The intervals which separate them may be called “inorganic periods, or times of transformation.”

*How* the summits, of which Duruy thus speaks, are attained is surely to this traveller often a matter of doubt and wonder. It has frequently been his experience, his disappointment to find that his ideas of whence he has come and whither he is going are mistaken ideas. Much he forgets, much he cannot see for the darkness, much he must leave uncertain until some higher peak, perhaps at greater distance, permits a clearer view. In no case, however, will his philosophy be more liable to error than when, having climbed rapidly some new, sharp ascent, he stands panting for further attainment, absorbed in the anticipations of the struggle for the next steps forward.

Compared with the course of evolution of the other states of the world, the rapidity with which the American nation has grown to its present position has been the wonder of all observers, and the cause of pride or jealousy to friend or foe. In our own land, our rapid progress has been the source of a rather bumptious national egotism which still persists; so much so that many fail to realize that now certain very deep and significant changes may indicate a pause in the “dynamic” rush of the last century. The occupation of nearly all the public lands fit for agricultural purposes, the emigration from the Northwest across the frontier into Canada, the return of Western farmers to intensive agriculture in Eastern and Southern states, the diminishing native birth rate in a large part of the country, the fact that foreign immigration is tending towards congested and unas-

simulated islands in our large cities rather than as of old to the great open West:—are not all these and a hundred other phenomena indications that we are approaching a static condition of society, in which the great advantages that have hitherto been ours will be levelled down by the struggle for existence and in which we shall have to meet many of the problems which our grandfathers rejoiced to have left behind?

In one part of our country, however, the rush upward and onward is still in its youth. Hampered in the earlier part of its history by its physical geography and by its institutions, thrown back violently by the War and a destructive Reconstruction, the South seems just now to have begun a belated dynamic change, and to be at the beginning of a progress towards industrialism similar to that which characterizes other parts of the country. This is set before us by the sober statistics of the census and of State Reports, by the ardent propagandism of journals, by the somewhat militant agitation of newspapers, railroad folders, and city advertisements. The *vox populi* in the South surely recognizes, proclaims, and preaches a desire to reap to the full the benefits with which Nature has endowed us, and to catch up with those sections which hitherto have led in material advance.

Material progress, wherever and whenever it takes place, seems to excite the interest and enthusiasm of the many. It must be remembered, however, that there are always those who take the opposite point of view. We recall Wordsworth's lament of a century ago:

When I have borne in memory what has tamed  
Great Nations, how ennobling thoughts depart  
When men change swords for ledgers, and desert  
The student's bower for gold, some fears unnamed,  
I had, my country, am I to be blamed?

Now, a hundred years later, England still lies under indictment for her materialism and her commercialism. The poet laureate laments the growing distaste for the higher forms of poetry, and other writers fill the reviews with lamentations over the "materialism of English life" in its journalism, its sports, its drama, and its Church.

Even more frequently is the worship of the Almighty Dollar

cast in the teeth of our own Nation. Very recently Mr. Bryce, viewing the American commonwealth after some years interval warns us against our increasing commercialism. Here in the South, President Denny, at a late meeting of the Association of the Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Southern States, indicts the commercialistic tendencies in our educational system. Thus, it would seem that everywhere men are divided into two camps, the one devoted to "booming" their mines, railroads, and industries, the other standing aloof and lamenting the loss of what is best and greatest in humanity. Set in fervid if not lurid words, this antagonism is perhaps best expressed, in recent literature, by the clever Englishman who under the guise of a Chinese Official says:

"That issue I would put somewhat as follows: Is that which created the religion, the art, the speculation of the Past; that insatiable hunger for Eternity which, by a sacramental mystery, has transubstantiated into the heavenly essence of the Ideal the base and quotidian elements of the Actual; that spirit of unquenchable aspiration which has assumed, in its tireless quest for embodiment, forms so alluring, so terrible, so divine, which has luxuriated in the jungle of Hindoo myths, blossomed in the Pantheon of the Greeks, suffered on the cross, perished at the stake, wasted in the cloisters and the cell, which has given life to marble, substance to color, structure to fugitive sound, which has fashioned a palace of fire and cloud to inhabit for its desire, and deemed it, for its beauty, more dear and more real than kingdoms of iron and gold; is that hunger, in the future as in the past, to harass and hunt us from our styes? Is that spirit to urge as of old the reluctant wheels of our destiny? Or are we to fill our belly with the husks of comfort, security and peace? To crush in the dust under our Juggernaut car that delicate charioteer? Are we to be spirits or intelligent brutes; men or mere machines? That is the question now put, as it has never been put before, to the nations of the West, and preëminently to the people of these States."

If, now, the men of high moral purpose and good will to their fellows, who believe that these dangers are inseparably connected with our material progress, are correct in their view, it is the

duty of us of the South to follow them. If it is absolutely a choice between God and Mammon we should know where to give our allegiance and should be ready to give up all for the salvation of our ideals. The forces for good in the world must be united, not a house divided against itself. This question, then, presents itself to us directly and inevitably: Is material progress hostile to the spiritual? Are prosperity and idealism incompatible?

To the great mass of men, such a question seems like a voice from the tombs of the past; for is it not the age of material progress? But the opinion of the great mass is just what the prophet does not hearken to. If we would convince him, it must be in his own tribunal of the spirit. How then shall we argue?

First, there exists a great fallacy in interpretation. Between idealism and ideals is the fundamental difference between the universal and the particular. Ideals change, but that which has and feels ideals persists.

The old order changeth, giving place to new  
And God reveals himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

The interpretation of perfection and the estimation of standards vary from one age to another. About one such uprooting of old ideals, Taylor's "Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages" tells the story, a story not without sadness. Yet shall we say that the victory of Christianity over Hellenic philosophy was a loss in idealism? Again, as the glorious vision of the Holy Roman Empire passed away and the new ideal of nationality came into the minds of men, shall we say that this was a change for the worse:—that we should rather have been wrong with Dante than be right with Mazzini? Does it not then savor somewhat of presumption, for any of us to bemoan the loss of idealism, when a clearer vision might reveal that it is only *our ideals* that have gone?

Next, looking at the past, is it true that material progress has always, usually, or ever destroyed idealism? The cheap dogmatic statement that "All history shows" what the preacher or the writer wants to prove, is pain and grief to the trained student of History, who well knows what laborious investigation, what minute verification must precede any general induction.

Many such trained investigators, perhaps an increasing number, lean to the belief that material progress is fundamental to all real progress; but let us not enter the thorny path of the economic interpretation of history — let us merely show that the burden of proof lies on the other side by suggesting that most great ages of idealistic manifestation in poetry and art; — the age of the Homeric poems, sung at the court of princes; the age of the Attic drama, produced in imperial Athens; the Augustan Age; the age of the Revival of Learning in Italy; and the Age of Shakespeare — all coincided with, or followed, periods of marked material prosperity: from which fact, be it noticed, we argue merely that economic prosperity has not stifled idealism, not that the idealism depends upon economic progress. Perhaps, by one kind of logic, material wealth, and the devotion of men thereto ought to kill idealism, but it has not done so; and is the logic any better than that which would deny the idealism of Keats or of Browning because one was the son of an hostler, and the other of a bank clerk?

With regard to our American past, how much deeper and wiser is the insight of Woodrow Wilson, who has written of our national development: "Here is the secret, — a secret so open, it would seem, as to baffle the penetration of none, — which many witnesses of the material growth and territorial expansion of the United States have strangely failed to divine. The history of the country and the ambitions of the people have been deemed both sordid and mean inspired by nothing better than a desire for the gross comforts of material abundance; and it has been pronounced grotesque that mere bigness and wealth should be put forward as the most prominent grounds for the boast of greatness. The obvious fact is that for the creation of the Nation the conquest of her proper territory from Nature was first necessary; and this task, which is hardly yet completed, has been idealized in the popular mind. A bold race has derived inspiration from the size of the difficulty and the danger of the task."

Forever and ever it has been the delight of minds of a certain sort to look back to good old times "when all we met was fair and good" and to see naught but degeneracy in the present. But how universally when we look into it, does this golden age of

poetic fancy prove as elusive as the pot of gold at the rainbow's foot! The Romans were wiser — Janus faced both ways: mindful of the past but believing in a future. Those who believe that with us idealism is dead, miss the vision of the present and the future, and their fate may be that of — Lot's wife.

Coming now to our own time, and to the future, we are confronted with another epoch of material progress. It is the day when science teaches us more and more of her principles for practical application to the welfare of man. Indeed, science is for the Don Quixote of to-day the modern Sage Freston, who turns the windmills of progress into the Giant of Materialism. But whether Don Quixote will or no, in the South industrial growth is just beginning anew. As President Alderman has well said: "The South has regained the spirit of industrialism with which it started. Many details remain to be worked out, but the spirit is there. By industrialism I do not mean commercialism. Commercialism is a mere sordid theory of life. Industrialism is the scientific mastery of the raw material and its wise disposition according to the laws of trade. Thus considered industrialism is a mighty and a moral part of the movement of society. When the practice of industrialism catches up with the spirit, politics will be nationalized and thought liberalized in the South, for the economic structure of society is largely responsible for its ideals. Our real problem, therefore, is to try to industrialize our society without commercializing its soul. I wonder if the thing is possible."

The answer, we submit, depends on just this one thing: the ideals which are to be presented to future generations of our people. If we continue to live only in the past, to hold up as our cultural ideals those of eighteenth century England, and as our ideals of social organization only those of the agricultural society of antebellum times, the thing is not possible: and the new South will know us not. If we keep our idealism, all we have of it, but let the present and the future develop ideals of their own, the New South will grow naturally out of the old South and preserve what is best and finest in it. Much will pass away. On the one hand we have already awakened from the dream of Revolutionary philosophers which proclaimed the equality of men:

Calhoun saw that clearly enough. On the other hand we have to surrender the idea that any formation of society at a given time can be permanent, and to recognize that a man's ancestry alone will not command respect or bearing in the world. In place of these we must first substitute a greater appreciation of individual worth, a recognition of talent as talent, of genius as genius, wherever it is found. Secondly, we shall have to persuade ourselves of the solidarity of society: to believe that, if men are not created equal, neither are they created independent of each other. The educated man of the New South shall not be *ιδιώτης*, a "private citizen." It must be his ideal, as never before, to seek the good of all his people, saying with Terence, *Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto*.

These are some of the ideals in which, to the writer's mind, the idealism of the next period of our history must express itself. If we endeavor to be more explicit, into how many fields are we led! As to learning, for example, we must try to make the South acquainted with pure science, then to spread far and wide the application of it, welcoming the growth of technical schools, agricultural colleges, and the like, as a necessary part of modern civilization. Science has another service to render. The South needs to understand better what is meant by scholarship, in its modern sense, and to distinguish this from readiness in words or a pleasant personality. Another handmaid of science is criticism, fearless, constructive criticism, that which Matthew Arnold defined as "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world"—implying, of course, the demonstration that what is *not* the best, is not the best. Along with criticism go inseparably freedom of expression and freedom of the press: by which is meant freedom from social disfavor as well as mere immunity from legal punishment. Even more important is *Lehrfreiheit*, the freedom of the academic chair.

Surely, if we think and speak with fearlessness and freedom, we must wish for everyone to do the same. The cause of public education is steadily gaining ground in the South, but it has been an uphill fight. Here in the educational field, is an expression of that social solidarity of which we have spoken.



Henceforth it must be the endeavor of every college and university, no matter what its foundation, to be in full sympathy with the public school systems of our Southern States, and to employ every occasion for helpful influence. "The world could not last but for the breath of the school children."

In these and in many ways unknown to us now, the future will call for our highest idealism: and the fruits will not be wanting. To those of our brethren who are fearful of change let us recall what Arnold thought one of the finest things in English literature. If ever there was an arch-conservative, it was Edmund Burke, but he wrote in 1791: "If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it: the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope will forward it, and then they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm, but perverse and obstinate."

ST. GEORGE L. SIOUSSAT.

The University of the South.